

Using TEEL to write paragraphs

T

Topic Sentence

What is the main point of your paragraph?

This sentence should represent your main idea.

When read on their own, the topic sentence of each paragraph should be able to give the reader a clear idea of what your essay is about.

E

Evidence

What is your evidence?

Without evidence you will be simply relying on your opinion. Evidence could be a quote or reference to a key scene which reinforce the ideas found in your topic sentence.

E

Explanation

Why is your point important?

You need to explain your idea further following the evidence provided so that it is not dismissed by your reader.

L

Link

How does this relate to the actual topic?

To help you stay on track, always relate your paragraph back to the original topic. You can do this by using key words or referring back to the question/statement assigned.

Hints for English Literature 'A' level essays

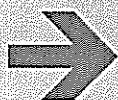


1. Ask yourself, 'What exactly am I being asked?'

Start by working out what the question is asking you. Try and establish several strands to the question, and try and decide what the 'heart of the matter' is for you.

2. Get the rough idea ...

Develop a rough plan outlining the sections of your essay, and a general idea of how you wish to conclude.



3. Start with a direct approach ...

Avoid lengthy introductions - try and make at least one main point in your introduction; don't just waffle around the subject!

4. Take it personally ...

Always always always approach the question from a *personal* viewpoint - show your own thoughts, opinions and analysis, not your teacher's or the writer of the appropriate York Notes! Phrases such as 'I think...', 'it seems to me ...' 'This passage highlighted this issue for me...' are useful here. Remember, you are not expected to 'know' the answer, simply to be able to explore possibilities based on your excellent knowledge of the text.

me, me,
me, me

5. Use the present tense ...

Write in the present tense, even when writing about autobiography. This helps your essay to sound *analytical* rather than narrative.

NOW!

6. Assume your reader is in the know ...

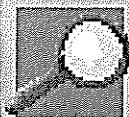
Remember your reader knows the text very well, so doesn't need events to be *described*. However, they do need your *analysis* of events, supported by examples and quotations from the text.

7. Don't memorise and use huge chunks of text ...

Avoid overlong quotations - keep them short and pithy. If you do need to use a quote which is more than a line long, introduce with a colon, begin on the line below and indent. Try not to 'list' quotes, and make sure you always discuss them.

8. Get your magnifying glass out!

Take a good look at language and style, as these are the means by which you, the reader, gain an understanding.



9. And finally ...

Don't just use your conclusion to summarise what you have already said - try to take the discussion forward somehow, or save your main point for this purpose.

The Importance of Essay Planning

If you've ever written a shopping list and then forgotten to take it shopping but still remembered to buy everything on your list you'll know that the process of writing the list is almost as important as the list itself. It's the same with an essay plan – the process of writing it will allow you to really consider the implications of a question and all the points you need to include in order to answer it in a way that you wouldn't if you just launched yourself into the essay. A plan should also help you to organise your ideas. Time spent planning is never time wasted. Planned essays are more likely to answer the question in a concise and structured way.

The Stages of Essay Planning

There are definite stages to planning an essay which are as important to follow for coursework essays as for essays written in exam conditions.

1. Read the question (several times)
2. Identify the key words in the question and underline them
3. Explore these key words
4. Write a plan which addresses these key words and orders your ideas
5. Start writing your essay and refer regularly to your plan

Considering the Title

Essay titles are generally framed in the same kind of way. You may be asked to discuss, consider or explore a text or a particular aspect of it. You may be asked what you think about an aspect of a text or you may be invited to consider the validity of a particular statement about a text. You could also be asked to compare and contrast two or more texts.

It is important to make a distinction between the wording of the title itself and the key words which separate the particular title from any other. So if a question asked you to, 'Discuss the importance of time in *The Child in Time*' you could substitute the word 'discuss' for 'explore' or 'consider the importance of' or 'what do you think is important about' and you are still being asked to write an essay about essentially the same thing. The most important word in the question is 'time' and you must consider this in detail before you start writing your response.

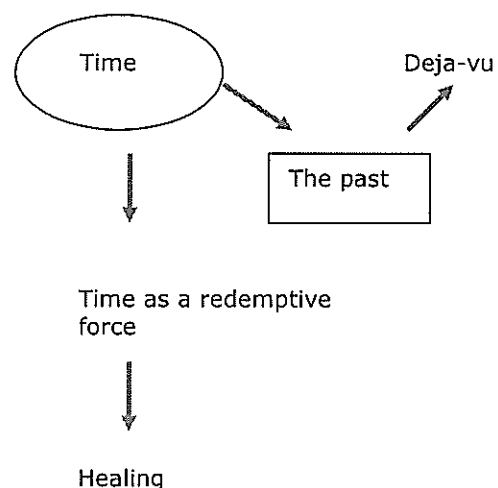
EXPLORING KEY WORDS

Once you have identified and underlined the key words in the title you should spend time exploring them. You could do this as a brainstorm where you simply jot down anything that comes into your head in relation to the key words or you could use a 'mind map' which should help you to organise your ideas as they come to you. You can see the beginnings of both approaches below.

Time (brainstorm)

The past
History
Memory
The past
Linear/ non-linear
Going back in time
Patterns and sequencing
The science of time
Existence outside time
Trapped by time (birth, death)
Units of time (weeks, months, years)
Time standing still
Time as a redemptive force

Time (mind map)



Planning

Each of the approaches above has its merits or you may have or wish to develop your own way of exploring key words. What is important is that during the planning process you allow yourself the time to really think about the key words in the question and that you also spend time ordering your ideas into clear arguments.

At school you may have been taught to do a spider diagram to plan your answer. This is fine as a way of getting your ideas onto paper but it can then be tempting to start at the top of the diagram and work your way around the ideas in a clockwise fashion. This means ideas are often not linked or effectively structured and can be repeated. So, if you begin your plan with a spider diagram or brainstorm you must then spend time ordering the ideas you have come up with into groups. You could do this by colour coding them, drawing shapes around them or re-writing them into separate lists.

Writing skills – planning your response

1. Underline the purpose, audience and form (**PAF**) in the question. Write these at the top of your page to keep you focused.
2. Jot down **general** success criteria for writing at the top of your page.
e.g.
 - vocabulary (adventurous, for effect)
 - spelling (accurate, complex words)
 - punctuation (use a range e.g. : ; “ ” ! ‘ ?)
 - sentence structure (use for effect and to suit purpose. Try a variety of sentence openings – don’t always start sentences with a subject e.g. ‘I’)
 - paragraphs (different lengths including one word paragraphs if appropriate, cohesion devices, topic sentences if appropriate.)
3. Write a list of the **specific** success criteria relevant to the **purpose** of your writing.
e.g. writing to argue and persuade:
 - repetition
 - exaggeration/hyperbole
 - facts and statistics to back up a point (can be made up)
 - emotive language
 - opinion as fact
 - pronouns – we, you – to make the reader feel involved/address the reader
 - rhetorical questions
 - rule of three
 - alliteration
 - mock the opposing argument.
4. Create a rough **paragraph plan** at the top of your page, outlining (in brief) the content of each paragraph. If you prefer, jot down all your ideas for topics of paragraphs in a brainstorm then number them afterwards: you are aiming for four or five different points/arguments. It may be useful to include a brief note of the points/ideas you will include in each paragraph.
5. Choose a **cohesion device(s)** e.g. rhetorical question or firstly, secondly ... which is going to link your paragraphs together and/or be the link inside paragraphs and write it at the top of your page also.
6. Plan an **attention grabbing opening** and a **thrilling ending** (e.g. cliff-hanger, thinking point), perhaps even write these out first at the top of your page.

Effective introductions

What do you think?

When you write an essay, which do you find easier to write:

- a) the introduction and conclusion
- b) the main body of the essay?

Why do you think this is?

Read and check

The role of the introduction:

The introduction and the conclusion of a piece of writing can be the hardest parts to write. Most of the time, when an author starts writing something, they already have an idea of the points or arguments they will be using. This explains why the body is usually easier to write. Unfortunately, a piece of writing with a well written and well justified body is still incomplete without an introduction. This is because the introduction plays the role of a bridge, engaging the reader and transporting them from their reality, into the writer's reality.

Why is it important to write a good introduction?

- The introduction is your first contact with the reader. It is your chance to make a good first impression. If the introduction is disorganised and badly written, your audience will probably not put much credence in your ideas.
- The introduction is a guide for the rest of your composition. It prepares the reader for what you will be discussing.
- Ideally, your introduction should inspire the reader to continue reading. Since the introduction is the first thing the reader encounters, you should make it interesting so that they will want to continue. If your introduction is boring, there is a good chance the reader may choose not to read your work.

What do you think?

Decide whether the following statements are **true** or **false**:

1. You should write the introduction first.
2. You should write the conclusion last.
3. A good way to start the introduction is: *In this composition, I will be discussing ...*
4. In your introduction, you should not reveal what your main idea and key arguments are.
5. You can start your introduction with a question.
6. You can even start with a strange example or anecdote.
7. You should never start your introduction by quoting someone else.
8. When writing about a major issue, it is a good idea to start by saying that the issue has been important since the dawn of mankind.
9. Don't be too direct in your introduction. It is more impressive to use complex ideas and long sentences.

Read and check

How do you write a good introduction?

- Many people have the misconception that the first thing that they should write is the introduction. This is not true. Often, writers change things during the writing process, therefore their introduction may no longer accurately describe what their composition is about. Writing your introduction last ensures that it contains all the necessary and correct information. (N.B. This can be tricky to do in an exam unless you leave yourself plenty of space but is ideal when working on a computer.)
- An introduction should always begin in a way that attracts the audience's attention. Here are some ways you can do that:
 - ✓ use an intriguing example
 - ✓ include an interesting quote
 - ✓ tell an anecdote
 - ✓ ask a question.
- Your introduction should give the audience certain important information, such as your thesis statement and a brief summary of your arguments.

The thesis statement

The thesis statement is the central idea of the piece of writing. The thesis statement is usually made in one complete sentence in the introduction. It should be expressed in a clear and unambiguous manner.

- Your introduction should be direct and engaging. A sentence like: *Wayne Gretzky is known to be the best hockey player in the history of the sport* is much more engaging than: *In this composition, I will be discussing why I think Wayne Gretzky is the best hockey player in the history of the sport.* Both sentences introduce the topic, but the first one is more challenging and therefore catches the reader's attention better.

How do you avoid writing a bad introduction?

- Don't begin your introduction with a declaration about how your topic has been important since the dawn of mankind. This is an overused saying - in other words it is a cliché. It is important to avoid using clichés.
- Don't begin your introduction by saying: *In this composition, essay, etc. I will be discussing ...* This is an unoriginal and boring way to start a piece of writing.
- Don't write long sentences that lack any pertinent information just to make your introduction longer.

Rewrite it

Read the following introductions. For each, identify the thesis statement and decide why the introduction is weak. Rewrite the introductions using the tips given on the preceding pages.

1. In this argumentative essay, I will share my thoughts on the war in Iraq. I think the Iraq war is necessary for many reasons, such as: we must protect ourselves from nuclear bombs, we must protect ourselves from terrorists, and we must bring freedom to the citizens of Iraq.

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2. Since the dawn of mankind, there have been disputes and wars over religion. It is for this reason that I do not think religion has a place in the school system, in the government or in the judicial system of Canada.

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3. The Ministry of Education wants to have more control over the kinds of foods available in schools. They do not want the students to have access to foods and drinks that contain too much sugar or fat. They only want schools to offer foods that contain vitamins. They want their students to be in better health. Many people are opposed to this.

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How to Use Quotations Effectively

To quote
or not to
quote...

What is a quotation?

Quoting simply means repeating what someone else has said or written. When a character says something in a play or novel s/he is *speaking* but when you repeat what the character says in your writing or in oral work you are *quoting* the character. When you do this you must use quotation marks (also known as speech marks or inverted commas) to show that it is not your work.

Why use quotations?

Imagine you are a lawyer and your essay is your way of convincing a jury (your teacher or examiner) of your argument. A lawyer might be interesting, persuasive and thought provoking but without evidence a jury is never going to be sure that what the lawyer is saying is true. Quotes and examples work like evidence in a court case – they convince your audience that what you're writing is accurate.



Quotations, then, are used to support your own ideas, they should not take the place of your ideas nor should they be used to tell the story. Quotes are a useful way of exploring how theme, character and language are used in a play or novel or a particular part of it.

You should usually provide some kind of context for the quote and comment on what is interesting about it.

How to use quotations

Below are extracts from three students' essays. Each student is using the same quote from the play, *Death of a Salesman*, by Arthur Miller in an essay about the main character, Willy. Read the extracts and think about which is the most successful and why.

1. *We realize early on in the play that Willy is tired, 'You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away – a man is not a piece of fruit!'*
 2. *Willy tries to present himself as a successful salesman but is eventually reduced to pleading with his boss to be allowed to keep his job, 'You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away – a man is not a piece of fruit!'.*
 3. *The contrast between how Willy imagines himself to be as a successful salesman and the harsh reality of his life of debt and disappointment becomes increasingly clear to us as we watch Death of a Salesman. In Act Two, when Willy has been sacked from a job which was bringing him neither money nor happiness, Willy pleads with his boss telling him, 'You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away – a man is not a piece of fruit!'. Willy is comparing himself to a piece of fruit because he has finally realized he is expendable. Through the way Willy is sucked dry by the company for whom he works the play illustrates the way in which, in a capitalist system, human beings are discarded when they are no longer financially useful. This is Willy's tragedy.*
1. In the first extract the student hasn't used the quotation to support a point. She has chosen an interesting quote but hasn't said anything about it at all. The quote has just been tacked on to the end of her sentence.
 2. The quotation in the second extract has been used more effectively. It supports the point the student is making, the student makes some attempt to integrate the quote into his sentence and gives us a sense of why this quote is important in the play.
 3. Bingo! The third student has integrated the quote into her sentence, provided some context for it, used it to support her point and commented on what interested her about the quote in relation to language, theme and character. She has used the quote to help her construct a powerful argument.

Hinges, bolts and sealers

Hinges (for making comparisons)	Bolts (for argument building)	Sealers (for summing up)
<p>Although</p> <p>Both</p> <p>But</p> <p>Despite</p> <p>However</p> <p>In comparison</p> <p>In contrast</p> <p>Likewise</p> <p>On the other hand</p> <p>Unlike</p> <p>Whilst</p> <p>Yet</p>	<p>Also / As well as</p> <p>Another</p> <p>Consequently</p> <p>Firstly</p> <p>Furthermore</p> <p>Hence</p> <p>In addition / additionally</p> <p>Indeed</p> <p>Interestingly</p> <p>It could be said</p> <p>Maybe</p> <p>Moreover</p> <p>Perhaps</p> <p>Therefore</p> <p>Thus</p> <p>Undoubtedly</p>	<p>Above all else</p> <p>Finally</p> <p>In conclusion</p> <p>In general</p> <p>In summary</p> <p>Overall</p> <p>To summarise</p> <p>Most importantly</p>

Key Essay Words

Analyse:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- break up into parts- examine methodically and in detail
Compare:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- look for similarities <u>and</u> differences, but with the emphasis on similarities
Contrast:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- highlight the differences between
Define:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- give the meaning of- describe the subject matter or nature of
Describe:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- give a detailed account of: including characteristics, qualities or events
Differentiate:	similar meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- show the differences between
Distinguish:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- recognise or indicate the distinctive features, attributes, or traits
Discuss:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- give reasons for and against- also examine the implications- investigate, sift and debate
Elaborate:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- explain in minute detail- give account of- work out in detail
Enumerate:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- give the main features or general principles of a subject- mention them one by one
Evaluate:	similar meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- give your opinion or judgement
Criticise:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- back your opinion or judgement by evidence or reasoning
Examine:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- inspect in detail- investigate thoroughly
Explain:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- make clear by describing in more detail- reveal the relevant facts or ideas of the subject
Explore:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- examine thoroughly and discuss in detail- consider a variety of viewpoints
Illustrate:	similar meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- show the meaning of
Interpret:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- make clear by using examples, charts, drawings etc
Justify:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- show adequate grounds for decisions or conclusions- prove right the main objections likely to be made
Narrative:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- a written account of connected events
Outline:	similar meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- give a general plan showing the essential features but not the minor details
List:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- show a number of connected items
Prove:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- demonstrate to be true by evidence or argument
Relate:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- give an account of a sequence of events and how they affect each other
State:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- specify and present in a brief, clear form of writing
Summarise:	similar meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- give a brief statement of the main points of something
Review:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- omit minor details and examples
Substantiate:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- provide evidence to support or prove the truth
Trace:		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- follow the development or history of a topic from some point of origin

Transitional Words

To indicate sequence:

after / after that
and / and then
at this point / at this time
before
concurrently
finally
first of all
firstly, secondly, thirdly
followed by
last / lastly
meanwhile
next
previously
simultaneously
subsequently
the first / second / third reason

To give an example:

case in point
for example
for instance
in this case / way
lay bare
living proof
on this occasion
take the case of
this can be seen
to demonstrate
to display
to illustrate
to reveal
to show
when
where

To introduce an additional idea:

a different
a new
also
an added
an additional / additionally
an extra
and then
another
as well as
besides
equally important
finally
further
furthermore
in addition
likewise
moreover
one can also say
one more
what's more

To introduce an opposite idea:

an alternative
but
conversely
despite
even though
however
in contrast
nevertheless
nonetheless
nor can you ignore
on the other hand
one could also say/add
still
then again
though
where
whereas
while
yet

To compare:

alike
as seen/shown/discussed
balanced against
both
by comparison
equally
evaluate
in a different sense / way
like / likewise
match
one and the same
put side by side
same / in the same way
similar to / similarly
weigh against
whereas

To contrast:

a different view is
a variation
balanced against
contrasting views
conversely
differing from
discrepancy
disparity
dissimilarity
distinction
however
in contrast
on the contrary
on the other hand
unlike

To summarise or conclude:

accordingly
and so
as a result
as shown
consequently
finally
for this / that reason
hence
in brief / short
in conclusion
in other words
in summary
in view of that
on the whole
summing up
therefore
thus
to conclude
to summarise / sum up
ultimately

To show emphasis:

according to
as much as possible
essentially
extremely
ideally
in any event
in fact
in reality
indeed
must
officially
practically
primarily
primary
significantly
technically
that is
theoretically
to be sure / certain
undoubtedly

Transitional Words

To indicate time:

after / afterwards
 after awhile
 afterward
 as long as
 as often as
 as soon as
 at length
 at that time
 at this point in time
 before
 currently
 during
 erratically
 finally
 formerly
 frequently / infrequently
 immediately
 in a while
 in the interim / meantime
 in the same period
 infrequently
 initially
 later / later on
 meanwhile
 never
 now / right now
 presently
 previously
 prior to
 recently
 seldom
 shortly
 since
 soon / soon after
 subsequently
 then
 thereafter
 until
 when / whenever
 while

To show subtraction:

after all
 against
 almost
 although
 although this may be true
 at the same time
 barely
 but
 by groups
 different from
 either ... or
 even though
 for all that
 hardly
 however
 however
 in contrast to
 individually
 instead / instead of
 it is true
 just
 less than
 neither ... nor
 nevertheless
 non-
 not
 notwithstanding
 on the contrary
 on the other hand
 or
 other
 other than
 otherwise
 practically
 separately
 still
 with the exception
 yet / and yet

To show result:

a number of
 accordingly
 as a result
 as determined by
 because of
 completely
 consequently
 hence
 in part
 partially
 satisfactorily
 so that
 then
 thereby
 therefore
 thereupon
 thus

To show place:

adjacent to
 at first
 at the beginning
 beyond
 finally
 first, second, third
 here
 in relation to
 in the end
 nearby
 neighbouring
 on the opposite side
 on the same side
 opposite to
 over
 pre- / post-
 there
 under
 where

To show purpose:

another reason
 because
 for / for this purpose
 in order that
 in response to
 so that
 to this end
 with this object

To show frequency:

a percentage
 all
 alternately
 always
 commonly
 constantly
 each / every
 few / fewer
 frequently
 infrequently
 many
 more
 most
 never
 often
 one or two
 only
 rarely
 several
 some
 throughout
 usually

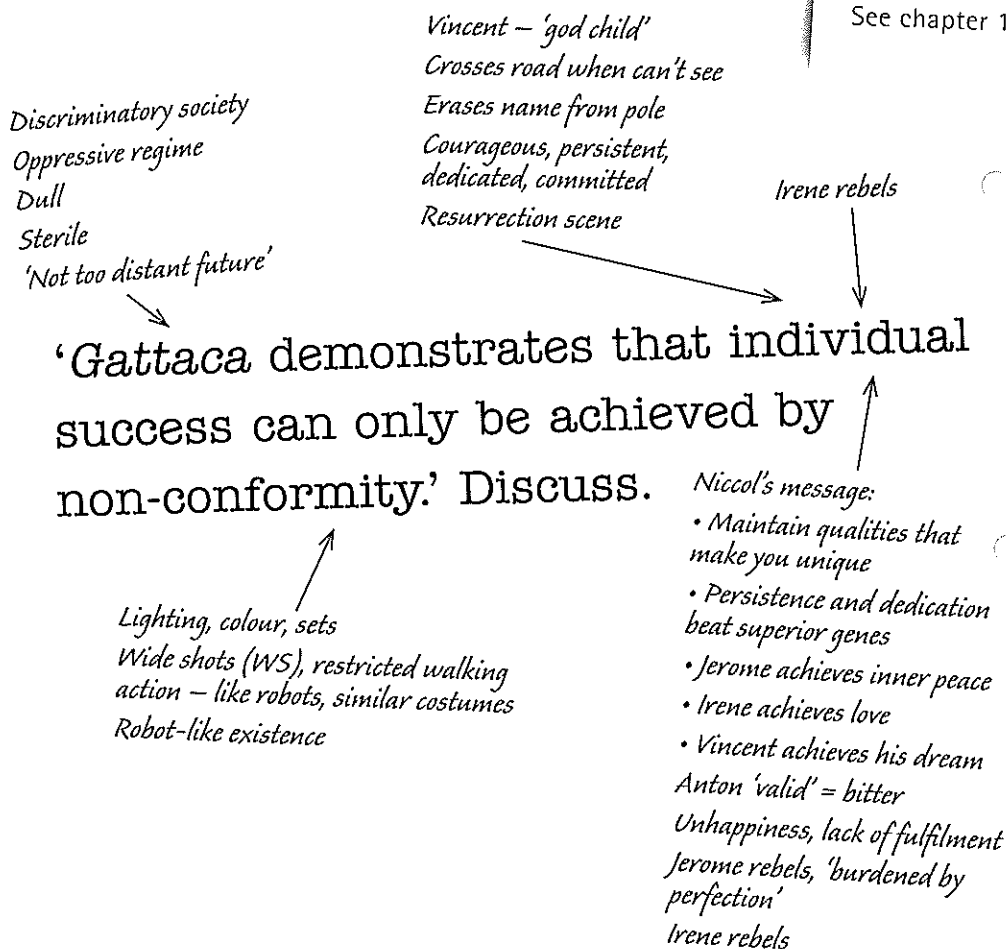
To show coincidence:

at the same time / place
 during
 equally important
 in the meantime
 in the period / in the same period
 incidentally
 meanwhile

Fast four steps to text response

1 Attack topic

You must identify all parts of the topic. Read the topic carefully and underline or circle the key words. Identify the themes and issues from the set text in the topic and the ones that are missing. You need to form your point of view/perspective; that is, whether you agree/disagree (in part or in whole) with the topic. You may also need to define difficult words (always have a dictionary with you) or explain quoted words. See the example below.



Need to know

Fast four steps to text response

- 1 Attack topic
- 2 Plan
- 3 Write
- 4 Review and edit

*Step 5 is to present your oral or multimodal text response. See chapter 10 for more advice.

2 Plan

Planning is an important part of essay writing. It's a good idea to allow 10 per cent of the total time for a plan. In your plan you should list points and any evidence supporting these, in order, and follow the traditional structure of introduction, body and conclusion. See the No-fail essay structure on p. 30.

Warning!

Too much time spent on planning in a timed SAC or exam means less actual writing time. In the Year 12 end-of-year exam, examiners do not correct plans.

3 Write

When you write a formal analytical essay aim for five to seven paragraphs (800 words approx.) and to fit all your points from your plan into the **No-fail essay structure**.

As you write, keep the topic in mind so that you stay focused and don't forget to follow **Introduction hints** and use **Link words and phrases** to join points and paragraphs. Always include everything when you write as you will revise and edit your essay later.

If you are writing an oral presentation you will need to adapt the **No-fail essay structure** to suit the form chosen; for example, using 'signposts' and 'visuals'. See chapter 10 for more advice.

No-fail essay structure

Introduction 1–2 paragraphs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain your viewpoint/perspective• Define terms (only if necessary)• Briefly mention key points related to theme• Mention form, genre, creator's name, title
Body 4–5 paragraphs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Separate paragraph for each key point• Each paragraph should follow the TEE design (below)• Link paragraphs
Conclusion 1 paragraph	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Restate your viewpoint/perspective clearly• Summarise main supporting points• No new points

Introduction hints

- 'I agree with the above topic statement' is *not* a good way to start.
- Don't use pre-written introductions. (Teachers have read every one of them already!)
- Don't explain what the text is about.
- State your perspective on the text and topic.
- Mention key points.
- Mention the title, creator and themes.
- Use different sentence beginnings and two different verbs.

TEE design

T = topic sentence

E = explanation

E = evidence from text

Link words and phrases

- Furthermore...
- However...
- Conversely...
- Nevertheless...
- Although...
- It could be argued...
- In one sense...
- On closer examination...
- From a different perspective...
- In another sense...

4 Review and edit

You need to review and edit your text response carefully to make sure that it is on the topic, is logical and uses formal language and that you have quoted examples correctly. Use the following Text response checklist and PETs (practical editing tips, p. 146) to help you. Check that you have quoted examples correctly by reading the **Quote correctly** advice below.

Text response checklist

- ① Perspective on text prompt is in introduction
- ② Author's name, text title and form are in introduction
- ③ Key points related to themes/issues are in introduction
- ④ Key words from prompt are used in response
- ⑤ Formal structure (intro-body-conclusion) is used
- ⑥ Paragraphs contain topic sentence, explanation and evidence from text
- ⑦ Paragraphs are linked
- ⑧ All points relate to themes/issues, views/values, character, plot, setting and style of text
- ⑨ Quotes from text support points
- ⑩ Language related to text form is used
- ⑪ 'I think', 'I feel' and 'In my opinion' are not used unless it is an oral presentation
- ⑫ Formal, sophisticated language is used
- ⑬ Response is edited carefully.

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Quote correctly

Quoting evidence from a set text is important when you write a formal text essay because it demonstrates your close knowledge of the text. Follow these tips:

- Ⓓ Don't quote page numbers.
- Ⓓ Avoid quoting big chunks of text.
- Ⓓ Use quotation marks to show where the quote begins and finishes.
- Ⓓ Weave quotes of one to four words into your sentences.
Example: Andrew Niccol's film *Gattaca* is set into the 'not too distant future'.
- Ⓓ Always make sure your quotes support points mentioned.
- Ⓓ If quoting more than one line from a poem or dramatic text you need to use a slash (forward slanting stroke) to show the end of a line. *Example:* 'O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!/Thou know'st that Banquo, and his Fleance, lives.'

Warning!

When handwriting an essay the title of the text should be quoted or underlined (not both).

If the title of the text is the same as a character's name make sure you consistently differentiate between the two.

Example: 'Macbeth' (play), Macbeth (character)

4 Analytic/expository essay on a text

UNIT 3 Outcome 1

UNIT 4 Outcome 1

The course guidelines specify for both Units 3 and 4:

An extended written interpretation of one selected text in analytic/expository mode.

Study Design

Important note

All texts discussed in Section Two are on the 2000 English text list. In subsequent years some of these texts may change. Visit the Macmillan Website for updates on the set texts after the year 2000.



Go to 'Macmillan Education Australia', then 'Text updates & support' and then 'Examining English'.

What is the analytic/expository mode? It is a response to a text that involves either answering a specific question on that text or dealing with the themes and issues in the text without a specific prompt or question. It takes the topic or text apart and breaks it up into the various issues that have to be discussed and commented upon. A practical example of this follows (see page 66).

This is the traditional challenge that faces all senior students: how to write an essay on a book. It sounds difficult – a lengthy essay on a topic you've never heard of discussing a text you may find confusing. Worst of all, for some students, is the realisation that there are *no right answers*. Normally, there isn't any one way to 'read' a text. Complex texts don't work by simple formulas. It's all up for discussion. It's all a matter of 'interpretation', of opinion.

The good news is that it's not particularly mysterious. No two essays are exactly the same, but the overall procedure remains comfortably repetitive.

Of course, you have to know the text well in the first place. Certainly you have to structure the essay in a particular way, but the rules for that are easily learnt (see page 66). And as for all those themes and varying interpretations, don't worry. Just stick to the topic, refer constantly to the novel, play or film under discussion to back up whatever you're saying, and you can't go wrong.

There's no way all the possible interpretations of all the set texts can be discussed here, though pages 70–89 offer brief overviews (and sample questions) on a range of the most popular 2000 texts. What is offered are samples of the end product of all that work. Look at the following topics and how they could be transformed into successful essays.

ANALYSING AN ESSAY TOPIC

It's really quite easy. Look at the following topic.

'*Montana 1948* is about the loss of innocence and the painful getting of wisdom.'

Discuss.

Now even if you haven't read the novel *Montana 1948*, it will be obvious what an essay on this topic would have to discuss. The key ideas built into the topic are:

- 'loss of innocence'
- 'the getting of wisdom'.

This is a typical theme-based question (that is one which tests whether you understood the central themes of the work). Other topics might choose to deal with a central character, but they will always state whatever it is they want you to discuss. What would an essay on the topic above need to deal with? Clearly it would become a discussion of the character who loses his innocence and gains some sort of wisdom (the narrator, David), as well as the nature of that 'innocence' and that 'wisdom'. You would need to think through questions such as:

- What was David innocent about? What did he believe in his innocence?
- What did he learn that changed him? How did it affect his view of the world?
- Did other characters lose their innocence too?
- Does this theme apply to the wider world or the author's vision?
- What 'wisdom' did David pick up? Was it all good or bad or a mixture of both?
- Did the transformation damage him or did he survive intact?

What about this topic?

'It is Pip's insecurity and arrogance which drive him, until suffering cures him of his illusions.'

Is this how you see *Great Expectations*?

It doesn't matter whether you've read the novel or not. What would an essay on this topic entail? You would have to deal with these sorts of issues:

- Why is Pip insecure?
- Is he arrogant? How does this show itself? What does it cause him to do wrong?
- How do these qualities 'drive' him? To what is he driven?
- What causes him to suffer? Is this suffering useful? How?
- What illusions does he have?
- Does he abandon them? How? Why?
- What replaces them? Cynicism or belief?
- What is the point of all this transformation?

You see, any topic can be pulled apart. To analyse the topic is actually quite easy, even without having read the book!

The wonderful thing about a text essay is that the topic is not really going to be a mystery at all. It *must* identify certain key themes or characters or problem issues for you to discuss (as in the above samples), and since these will already be well known to you (from your class study and private work on the text), there's nothing to fear. The trick is simply to work out *what* you are being expected to discuss, and then write about it in a coherent fashion.

Developing a text essay

The English course requires you to analyse and interpret the texts you read and discuss in class. This requires you to be able to write sustained, well-planned and expressively written essays. The trap that some students may fall into is merely to recount the narrative without any analysis of the issues demanded by the topic, in effect, they retell the story. The key thing to do is to answer the question, to be clearly responding to the prompt or exam question.

This section takes you through some approaches to developing a contention, and to planning and writing an effective text essay.

The most effective way to begin an essay is to develop a contention from the topic; this ensures that your answer will be relevant and appropriate to the topic. This might be helped by building a concept map brainstorming the kinds of connections and ideas you want to develop.

The diagram on the facing page shows the beginnings of a concept map based around the Part 1 question on *1984* from the 2007 English Exam Sample released by VCAA in April 2006. The question was: 'Fear destroys Winston's spirit'. A concept map is a good way to explore the ramifications and dimensions of the question, to look for strands that might be useful to explore and to make sure that you don't rush into your first response.

The advantage in mind-mapping a topic, or visually brainstorming it, is that it allows you to list as many things as possible, and then later draw connections and links between them, creating sequences, cause and effect associations or contrasts. Some students do this in their heads. Other, more visual learners, prefer to use pen and paper or a software program.

Whichever way you work, the first thing to do is to explore the topic and its ramifications. Underline the key words, search definitions for words you're unsure about and consider if any of the words in the topic might need defining. In the brief Orwell topic here, 'Fear destroys Winston's spirit' the words 'fear' and 'spirit' are clearly central, but it's the word 'spirit' that is possibly ambiguous and in need of further defining. The essay is clearly to be focused around the character Winston and the essay will need to come to a position, but it will need to be clear too about just what the writer means in the essay by 'spirit'.

Once you've thought carefully about the topic and its dimensions it's time to form a contention, hypothesis or, more simply, an answer. This contention is the real basis for your essay; it's your main idea, which should be clearly communicated in the introduction with reasons given. In its most simple form the contention might be a rephrasing of the question; 'It is fear that destroys Winston's spirit' or an elaboration of it, 'It is not merely fear that destroys Winston's spirit'. Even more elaborate contentions need to be clearly on topic, using the key words from the question even if you're expressing disagreement with the question.

Your contention is the key thing you are trying to prove in your essay. You should list the three to five major arguments you have that support your contention and then develop the essay with each of these major arguments being discussed in a paragraph of its own. Each body paragraph should discuss in some detail, including quotes and examples, one of the key arguments in favour of your contention. These paragraphs should be linked to ensure that the argument develops as it goes; many writers like to leave their most powerful arguments until near the end of the essay, others will use an early paragraph to dismiss counter-arguments, almost in debating style. The essay then concludes by reiterating your contention, showing the reader just how effectively you've proved your central point through the carefully planned and carefully expressed piece of writing. The following pages illustrate some of these concepts in diagram form.

Four steps to developing an effective essay



1 Read the essay question carefully looking for key words, key concepts and opportunities for you to demonstrate your reading. Don't jump too quickly into your first impulse; consider how the question might be interpreted.

2 Develop an **answer**. You can call this a contention, hypothesis or main idea, but essentially it's the whole point of what your essay is trying to prove or demonstrate.

3 Plan your essay in point form with your **answer** forming the core of your introduction and giving the three to five core arguments or reasons to back up your answer, each of which will develop into a paragraph of its own. Plan to use effective **words** and **quotes** in your paragraphs so that you don't omit your best evidence.

4 Write your essay, referring closely to your plan. If you've worked carefully through the first three steps, this should be straightforward, elaborating and detailing each of your dot points into complete and expressive sentences.

Structuring your essay

Introduction

The introduction should state your main idea, contention or answer in an interesting way, answering the question as well as providing an indication of where the essay will develop from here, listing the main arguments that are to follow in the order that you intend making them.

Paragraph 1

This is the first major argument in support of your answer or contention, including evidence in the form of quotes and examples from the text to support your arguments. Make sure that the paragraph uses the key words and concepts from the essay question and that the topic sentence or main idea of this paragraph is clearly supporting your contention.

Paragraph 2

This is the second major argument in support of your contention, as above.

Paragraph 3

This is the third major argument in support of your contention, as above.

Paragraph 4

This is the fourth major argument in support of your contention, as above. Most essays will generally have three to five paragraphs in the main body of the essay.

Conclusion

The conclusion should draw together your arguments in an interesting way, reiterating your arguments and referring again to the question and demonstrating just how you have answered it.

How to write an analytical essay

- 1** Brainstorm and note down any ideas that occur to you about the topic. What are the key words? Write your ideas in a 'web', fanning out from the centre of the page.
- 2** Plan the structure of the essay. Which points belong together? How can you link your ideas? The structure of your essay might be:

Introduction

- identify the text you are writing about
- define the key words if necessary
- state your contention

Body of essay

- one paragraph for each main point
- constantly refer to the topic
- make sure paragraphs connect
- use quotes and examples to back up the points you make

Conclusion

- sum up the main ideas
- restate your contention in different words
- end strongly.

- 3** Write the essay, paying careful attention to the logical flow of paragraphs, making sure that you cover only one point in each paragraph, and constantly referring to the key words of the topic.

- 4** Proofread your work.

- 5** Evaluate your essay using the following checklist. You will find a template on the CD called **Analytical essay checklist**.

Template



- Does the essay answer the question?
- Have you explained yourself in enough detail?
- Did you give enough examples and quotes?
- Have you avoided unnecessary repetition?
- Is your essay in paragraphs?
- Do the paragraphs flow in logical order?
- Does the introduction contain your contention?
- Does the conclusion sum up your view?
- Are your spelling, grammar and punctuation correct?
- Have you expressed all your ideas correctly?

Essay Writing Guide

Question Selected

Introduction:

Rephrase question

Contention

Arguments with evidence

1. Argument

Evidence

Argument

Evidence

Argument

Evidence

Linking sentence

Paragraph One

Topic Sentence

Main argument/justification

Evidence

Link to the question

Paragraph Two

Topic Sentence

Main argument/justification

Evidence

Link to the question

Paragraph Three

Topic Sentence

Main argument/justification

Evidence

Link to the question

Conclusion

Overview of main points

1.

2.

3.

Closing sentence which links back to the question
